

The History Evolution of Former Tainan Prefecture Public Hall

Wen-Bin Lin¹, Kao-Feng Yarn²

^{1,2}Department of Semiconductor Engineering,
CTBC University of Technology, Taiwan 744, ROC

Corresponding Author: Wen-Bin Lin

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260455>

ABSTRACT

The Public Hall, once a gathering place in the memories of Tainan citizens, hosted all significant events; Wu Garden, one of Taiwan's four renowned gardens, was once a place where literati and scholars of the Qing Dynasty composed poetry and prose. However, at one time, due to spatial constraints, shifts in functional requirements, and the relocation of Tainan City's spatial center, this rare cultural open space in the city has gradually faded from people's memories, submerged in the urban flood.

Keywords: Japanese colonial period in Taiwan, Public Hall, Tainan City, Tainan Prefecture

1. INTRODUCTION

The former Tainan Public Hall, located in the Central-West District of Tainan City, Taiwan, was the first modern building in Tainan with public assembly functions during the Japanese colonial period. After the WW2, it served as the Tainan Community Education Center for an extended period. On June 26, 1998, it was designated as a Tainan City Municipal Historic Site. Currently open to the public as part of the "Wu Garden Arts and Culture Center," alongside the Wu Garden and Ryusho Restaurant [1].

The site of the Public Hall was originally the Wu Garden, belonging to the scholar-gentry Mr. Shangxin Wu during the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty. A portion of the Wu Garden remains on the site to this day [1]. It is said that the site of Wu Garden was previously the residence of Mr. Bin Ho, a Dutch interpreter who advised Koxinga to attack Taiwan during the Dutch colonial period. On May 3, 1661, Koxinga received Dutch envoys Thomas van Iperen and Leonard van Leonardus, who had been introduced by Mr. Bin Ho, at this location [2].

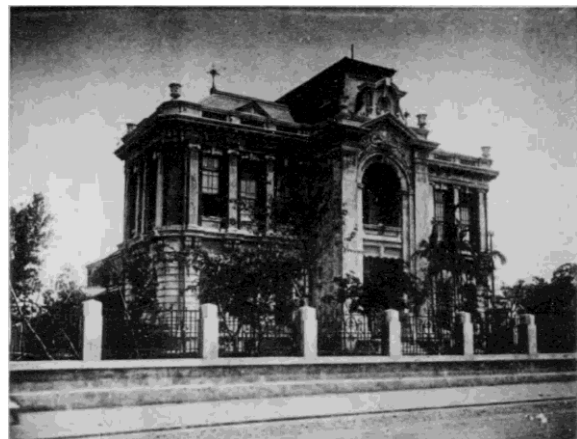


Figure 1: Public Hall during the Japanese colonial period [1].

2. HISTORY

During the early years of Japanese colonial period in Taiwan, the Tainan area lacked public gathering places. In 1907, Tsuda Kiichi, the head of Tainan Prefecture,

convened local officials and dignitaries to resolve the establishment of the “Tainan Public Hall Incorporated Association.” The plan called for each official and citizen of Tainan to contribute five yen as a founding fund [3]. At this time, due to the Wu family's financial difficulties, they were selling their ancestral home. The organization then planned to purchase Wu Garden to construct a Western-style mansion. Then, in July of 1910, the “Tainan Public Hall Incorporated Association” was reorganized into the “Tainan Public Hall Foundation [3].” In the same year (1910), in preparation for the Southern Products Exhibition (held in February 1911), Mr. Shigetoshi Matsuki, then Director of Tainan Prefecture, commissioned technician Mr. Shizumitsu Yatagai to design this building. It was constructed with over 40,000 yen in joint public and private funding [1].



Figure 2: Current Condition of the Public Hall Façade.



Figure 3: The French roof and dormer window of the Public Hall feature bull's-eye windows inside.



Figure 4: The parapet walls of the roof sections flanking the hall are adorned with green-glazed floral tiles commonly seen in Taiwanese residences.



Figure 5: The exterior of the hall's wings features intricate moldings that clearly delineate two distinct stories. The second floor incorporates Japanese-style long windows set within walls divided by four massive Ionic columns.

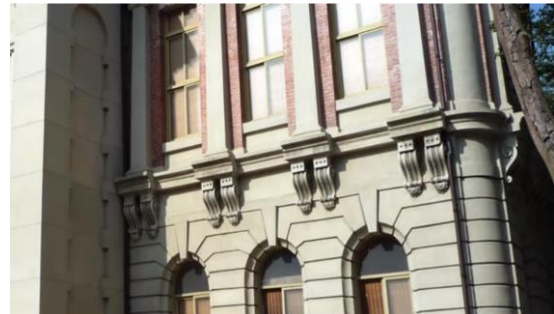


Figure 6: The corbels beneath the Onic-style columns flanking the hall's wings feature a cement core with a washed stone finish applied to the surface, mimicking the appearance of European stonework.



Figure 7: The rear elevation of the Public Hall connects to the expansive assembly space.

Construction commenced on September 12, 1910, undertaken by Sasaki-gumi under Mr. Noritsuna Sasaki. The completion ceremony was held on February 1, 1911 [3-5]. In 1918, a 45-tsubo Japanese-style tatami room and a 12-tsubo Noh stage with a control room were added to the main building [3].

The building was initially known as the "Tainan Public Hall." After the dissolution of the "Tainan Public Hall Foundation" on August 10, 1923, it was renamed the Tainan Public Hall [3-4]. The building served as an important gathering place for Tainan citizens at the time and also fulfilled the function of educating the populace [1]. At that time, the formulation of major public policies for Tainan City, and even Tainan Prefecture and Kaohsiung Prefecture, along with speeches and assemblies, were all held here. After the Taiwan Cultural Association was established, figures such as Mr. Pei-huo Tsai and Mr. Hsing Lien also delivered speeches at this venue [4].



Figure 8: The Wu Garden Pavilion behind Tainan Public Hall is currently open to the public as the Dr. Yude Wang Memorial Hall.

After World War II, the government renamed this building the Zhongshan Hall, for use by the Air Force Newcomers' Society and the Military Friends' Society [5]. It was later renamed the Provincial Tainan Community Education Center [2] in June 1955 and underwent renovations [1]. After the Social Education Center relocated to Tainan City's Phase 5 Redevelopment Area in 1994 [4], the building faced demolition proposals due to its downtown location to make way for commercial high-

rises [4]. Ultimately, these plans were abandoned, and the structure was repurposed as the Wu Garden Arts and Culture Center [1]. It has taken on its present appearance following recent renovation work.

3. TAINAN PUBLIC HALL FOUNDATION

The organization operating "Tainan Public Hall" does not have a dedicated manager; instead, its operational policies are determined by the Council of Directors [3]. The department comprises the General Affairs Section, the Business Section, and the Accounting Section, with an additional position for a chief cook. Following the dissolution of the organization on August 10, 1923, ownership of the Tainan Public Hall was transferred to the Tainan City Office.



Figure 9: The two wings of the hall and the grand assembly hall at the rear of the hall.



Figure 10: Grand Assembly Hall.



Figure 11: Behind Tainan Public Hall lies the Wu Garden Pavilion, now open to the public as the Dr. Yude Wang Memorial Hall. Further back stands the Far Eastern Department Company Park Branch.

4. ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The Tainan Public Hall is a Western classical-style building, with its overall space comprising the front building and the grand assembly hall at the rear. The Grand Assembly Hall is a wooden structure built upon a foundation, emphasizing functionality over ornamentation with Western historical architectural vocabulary. The front building features more Western historical architectural vocabulary in its ornamentation. The second floor of the central entrance section features a balcony, while the triangular pediment above it is adorned with intricate decorative reliefs. Above the gable rises the building's highest roof, featuring a projecting dormer window with an oculus window inside [1]. The main (tower) structure features a French roof topped with fish-scale tiles and crowned with finials [1].

The entire building is essentially composed of a central entrance, two wings on either side, and a grand assembly hall at the rear. The Grand Assembly Hall is a wooden structure built on a foundation to accommodate the terrain. Its design is functional in approach and does not employ any Western historical vocabulary. However, due to the terrain on the north side, an arched basement was formed.

The two wings of hall are clearly composed of a single story constructed with horizontal imitation stone lines and a second story featuring Ionic columns. The ground floor features a raised plinth, with the front wall itself featuring three slightly recessed arched windows. Except for the keystone, the other arch stones are integrated with the horizontal line of the wall. The second story features four Ionic square pilasters supporting the lintel and projecting eaves, creating three bays. Above the eaves lies a parapet wall, with a vase placed at each corner. The east and west sides feature similar designs, though each spans only two bays. The wall structure is brickwork, with openings featuring flat arches. Corners are recessed and finished with rounded edges.



Figure 12: The Wu Garden Pavilion at the rear of Tainan Public Hall, currently open to the public as the Dr. Yude Wang Memorial Hall.

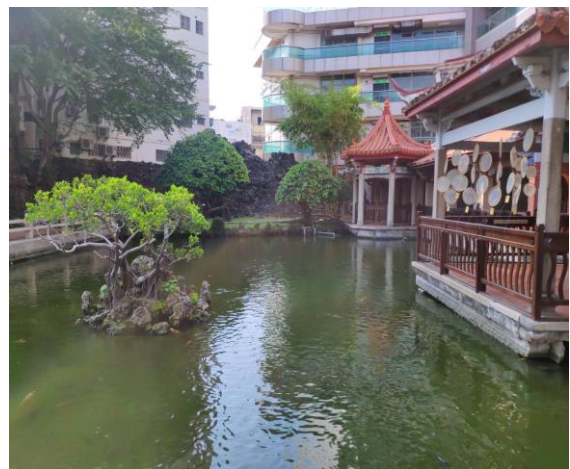


Figure 13: The Wu Garden Pavilion at the rear of Tainan Public Hall.

The two wings of the front building feature three slightly recessed arched windows on the ground-floor facade. The keystone of the window blends seamlessly with the horizontal line of the wall; On the front wall of the second floor, four Ionic square pilasters—a rare sight in Taiwan—support the lintel and projecting eaves, creating three bays. Below the pilasters, elegantly curved brackets provide support [1]. The parapet walls in front of the two-winged roof sections are adorned with green-glazed floral tiles traditionally used in Taiwanese architecture.



Figure 14: The Grand Assembly Hall prioritizes functionality over excessive ornamentation.



Figure 15: Architectural model inside the public hall.

Beside the house stands a circular well, while beneath the Great Assembly Hall lies a semicircular well within its foundation.

5. SURROUNDING FACILITIES

The building to the right of Tainan Public Hall was the Ryusho Restaurant during the Japanese colonial period. Constructed in 1934, it was one of Tainan's most renowned restaurants during that era. It currently operates as the tea lounge “Fengcha · Shibaomao.” Behind lie the remaining structures of the former Wu Garden, including Flying Peak and the Water Pavilion, with the Far Eastern Department Company Park Branch situated further back.



Figure 16: Ryusho Restaurant is one of the few remaining traditional Japanese-style restaurants in Tainan today.



Figure 17: The Residence of Mr. Na-ou Liu in Hsinying, Tainan [1].

6. CONCLUSION

As shown in Figures 1 through 17, although the Tainan Public Hall incorporates numerous vocabulary and elements from Western historical architecture throughout its structure, however, green-glazed floral tiles appear on the parapet walls of the roof

sections at both wings. This material is often used alongside red bricks in traditional Taiwanese architecture, serving functions of ventilation, natural lighting, and decoration, and possesses a strong sense of local identity. Thus, the Tainan Public Hall also acquired a touch of local flavor. During the Japanese occupation period, public halls served as the primary gathering places for citizens across various regions, exerting a profound influence on the populace. Consequently, the composition of this building also served as a reference for local gentry when constructing Western-style buildings. Shown in Figure 17, the conceptual similarities between the Residence of Mr. Na-ou Liu in Hsin-ying and the Tainan Public Hall are truly thought-provoking.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: No conflicts of interest declared.

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How to cite this article: Wen-Bin Lin, Kao-Feng Yarn. The history evolution of former Tainan prefecture public hall. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2026; 13(4): 541-546. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260455>
